Introduction

Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA accepts that, from time to time, people may wish to complain about the services provided by the Association. Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA wishes to respond to complaints, whether formal or informal, in a positive and constructive way in order to ensure that those complaining receive, wherever possible, satisfaction and that, through changing procedures, the Association’s performance might improve. This policy and attached procedures sets out how the Association will respond to and deal with complaints.

General Principles

The Association recognises that, as a registered charity and a registered social landlord, it has a responsibility to be open and accountable. The Association is also in receipt of significant public funds. As such Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA should welcome comments from residents, members, the public and stakeholders in order to improve service delivery and efficiency. It is hoped that, where possible, constructive comments can be received and acted upon in order to improve services.

It is recognised that, on occasions, the Association may make mistakes and fail to provide the services that are expected. Where this is the case it is important that an appropriate Complaints procedure is in place to enable those complaining to have their concerns addressed, and where appropriate to receive recompense.

As a diverse Association, Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA has a range of relationships with those who use its services – residents are licensees of the Association, gym members have a contractual relationship with us and members of the public use our services – this policy sets out how different stakeholders might receive an appropriate response from the Association.

The Association recognises a complaint as “any dissatisfaction (with an organisation) whether justified or not” (British Standard for complaint management 1999).

Complaints Reporting

The Association will use a variety of methods to respond to issues raised by those using our services. These are set out below.
Contact with staff
Often the most effective way of resolving a difficulty or a problem is at the time it occurs. An issue is usually reported to a member of staff. Staff will ensure that the customers concerns are listened to in a courteous and friendly manner. If they feel confident in dealing with the “complaint” then they should seek to do so. However, if necessary they should refer the matter to their line-manager or to the Duty Officer who will try to ensure that the matter is resolved. If this is not possible then a Customer Feedback form should be completed. All staff will be offered training in customer care and in managing complaints. It is recognised that the best way of handling complaints is to deal with them immediately and to ensure that those complaining receive immediate satisfaction.

Feedback Forms
The Association welcomes feedback from residents, members and customers. Feedback, even if negative, should be seen as a way of improving performance and rectifying problems. Customer Feedback Forms are available for completion at all reception areas and issues will be responded to in writing or by telephone, by the relevant Senior Staff Team member, within ten working days of receipt. The Chief Executive will regularly review a selection of Customer Feedback forms and the responses provided in order to ensure that issues are being addressed appropriately. Details of these reviews will be noted.

It is hoped that the effective use of Customer Feedback Forms will result in matters being resolved at an early stage, therefore avoiding the necessity of a formal complaint.

Formal Complaints
The Association accepts that, on occasions, matters are either so serious or informal methods have not provided the necessary changes, that a formal complaint is necessary. The Association provides a range of services and therefore two separate procedures have been adopted, one for housing and the other for programme activities. Details of the procedures to be followed are set out in this document.

Brief details of formal complaints received and how they have been resolved will be reported to the Audit Committee annually.

Serious Complaints
From time to time complaints of a serious nature may be made about the services provided by the Association or relating to Association staff. Where such a complaint involves a matter of public disclosure (or “Whistleblowing”) then the procedure in the Whistleblowing Policy should be followed. Where relating to a member of staff then the Director of Human Resources should be involved in order to assess whether or not disciplinary action is required. If a complaint alleges criminal activity of any kind
then this should be reported immediately to the Chief Executive who may decide (depending upon the circumstances) to refer matters to the Police. If a complaint relates to the Chief Executive then this should be referred to the Chair of the Board of Management.

**Responding to Complaints**

It is important that all complaints are responded to in an effective and efficient manner. The Complaints procedures set out timescales for responding at each stage. In certain circumstances it might be necessary, in order to gather further information and/or to ultimately speed up the resolution of the complaint, to elongate the process. If this is felt necessary the complainant should be kept informed of the progress of the investigation at every stage.

**Responding to complaints from third parties**

On occasions complaints might be forwarded to the Association via third parties – Voluntary agencies (CAB etc.), Members of Parliament, Members of the European Parliament, Local Councillors, GLA members etc. These should be responded to in accordance with the agreed procedures but account should be given to the Association’s Confidentiality Policy and the Data Protection Act. Any complaint received from any elected representative should, in the first instance, be referred to the Chief Executive.

**Resolution and Compensation**

For the vast majority of complainants who have raised legitimate concerns, the receipt of an appropriate apology and information regarding how procedures have been amended will suffice.

However, on occasions the Association might feel it appropriate, if a complaint is justified, to financially recompense the complainant.

Compensation will only be paid where:

- Specific financial losses have been incurred.
- The complainant has spent an unreasonable and significant amount of time pursuing the matter.
- Exceptional worry, distress or inconvenience has been caused by the events.

The Chief Executive has the authority to award a compensation payment up to the sum of £500. A Board panel can award compensation up to the sum of £1,000. Above this sum, compensation payments must be approved by the Board of Management.

It is also recognised that, on occasions, complaints cannot be easily resolved. Where appropriate the Association will utilise the services of a recognised mediation service where this is felt appropriate. The cost of this will be met by the Association.
**Training**

All relevant employees will receive some training in how to deal with complaints, and more generally in customer care. It is recognised that time spent training staff in handling complaints effectively can lead to matters being resolved quickly and without formal proceeding being initiated.

**Publicity**

The Association will produce a “user-friendly” leaflet setting out how to complain and this document will be reviewed, and where necessary, will be updated annually.

**Service Improvements**

The Association recognises that the effective management of complaints should lead to service improvements. Reports to the Audit Committee will be made, at least annually, indicating the following:

- Performance in meeting complaints response targets
- The percentage of complaints resolved immediately
- Customer satisfaction in the handling of complaints
- Customer compliments and suggestions
- Complaints data in each service area
- Complaints investigated by the Housing Ombudsman

It is anticipated that these reports will assist the Board and Senior Staff Team in identifying structural weaknesses in the Association and lead to continuous improvements in services.

**Review**

This policy will be reviewed regularly.
Complaints Procedure – Housing

Should the informal complaints procedure not have resolved matters then the following process should be followed:-

1st Stage

Following receipt of a completed Complaints form (all forms should be sent through to the Executive Assistant to The Chief Executive for logging) – he/she will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and advise that it has been sent to the relevant Centre Director for action. The relevant Centre Director (or her/his nominated representative) will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days. Some residents might require assistance in completing Complaints forms – assistance can be provided by members of the Housing Support team or by a third party such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. The acknowledgement of the complaint will also give an indication of when a substantive response to the complaint might be given. In any event, this should be within fourteen working days.

The Centre Director (or his/her nominated representative) will usually arrange to meet with the complainant at an early stage in order to review the Complaints form and to gather any further information.

The Centre Director will consider the complaint and will write to the complainant setting out his/her findings and, if necessary, offering resolution. A copy of all correspondence should be sent to the Executive Assistant to The Chief Executive for monitoring purposes.

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints will be resolved satisfactorily at this early stage. However, if the complainant is still not satisfied she/he will have the right to refer the matter to the second stage of the procedure.

2nd Stage

Should the complainant not be satisfied with the response from the Centre, they can ask for the matter to be considered by the Chief Executive, or in his/her absence, their named representative. He/she will review the information provided in the first stage of the procedure and may decide to meet with the complainant, if he feels that this might be necessary.

The Chief Executive has the right to agree with the decision of the Centre Director or to over-rule it. In exceptional circumstances he has the right to award compensation.
to the complainant up to the sum of £500. This stage of the procedure should be completed within fourteen working days of the matter being referred to him/her.

3rd Stage

Should the complainant still be not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint she/he will have the right to refer the matter to the Chair of the Board of Management. The Chair will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within three working days of receipt. The Chair will arrange for a panel of Board members to meet and consider the complaint, inviting the complainant to meet with the panel. The panel will consist of not less than two Board members.

The papers considered by the Centre Director and Chief Executive will be made available to the panel.

The decision of the panel will be binding on the Association. Again, the panel will have the right to award compensation up to the sum of £1,000. This stage of the procedure should be completed within fourteen working days of the matter being referred to the Chair.

Independent Housing Ombudsman

In the unlikely event of the matter still not being satisfactorily resolved, the complainant shall be advised that they can refer the matter to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Kingston and Wimbledon YMCA contributes to the funding of the Ombudsman’s scheme and welcomes the review of complaints by an independent body. Any decision by the Ombudsman will be reported to the Board of Management and usually abided by.

If the Ombudsman considers that the complaint has been dealt with effectively by the Association then that will bring matters to a conclusion. The resident obviously has the right to refer matters to their own solicitor/advocate if they feel that this is appropriate.
Complaints Procedure – Programme

1st Stage

The same procedure should be followed as for Housing.

2nd Stage

The same procedure as above.

3rd Stage

The same procedure as above.

4th Stage

This only applies to complaints relating to the Hawker Centre. If a complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaints procedure she/he can refer matters to the Assistant Director of Education (Leisure) at the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames. Contact details will be provided at the conclusion of the 3rd stage of the procedure.

A similar procedure will apply to complaints received regarding the Food and Beverage services at the main Surbiton site. A separate Complaints policy is in place in relation to the Care Homes in accordance with the requirements of the National Care Standards Act.